

## PART 2 WORLD WAR I

### PART 2.1 WAR: WORLD WAR I

#### Questions (FAL and HL):

1. After reading Sassoon's Declaration, conclude by stating the central theme, or idea that runs through the letter.  
*Protest: He is not opposed to the war, and is prepared to fight for a just cause but feels that the war has been turned into a war of conquest and aggression.*
2. Show evidence from Sassoon's poetry that bears out this theme.  
*In On Passing the New Menin Gate he talks of the 'foulness of their fate', and that the soldiers' deaths were 'unheroic'; that they were cannon fodder that 'fed the guns'; that they died nameless and unappreciated: 'these intolerably nameless names' in a war which was 'the world's worst wound'.*
3. What evidence is there in Sassoon's letter to the House of Commons/War Office that his view was representative of Officers who had seen active service as opposed to soldiers of the rank and file, or of conscientious objectors? (HL)  
*He uses the first person pronoun, 'we' when speaking of fellow soldiers and fellow officers. He claims to have witnessed first hand the sufferings of fellow soldiers. He makes it quite clear that he is not attempting to shirk his duty, but that those responsible for the deployment of troops have no idea of the sufferings of the troops they send into battle.*
4. What is particularly poignant about Sassoon not giving his rank or first name in signing off his letter? (HL)  
*He seems to identify himself with the common soldier, those under him. He counts himself as one of the men, not as an 'officer' with special privileges.*
5. What alternative course of action is Sassoon suggesting to the War Office?  
*He would like to see a negotiated peace.*
6. What was the War Office doing that was so abominable to Sassoon? Can you find evidence to support your answer in his poetry? (HL)  
*Without a care for the human lives they were sacrificing, the War Office was deploying regiments to battles like Passchendaele, where the outcome was based on a balancing of numbers: For instance, the Generals would calculate that if the Allies lost 2000 men and the Axis forces lost 2001, then the result could be counted as a victory. They did this without considering that they were playing with the lives of people.*

#### 8. *The Soldier* – Rupert Brooke (HL&FAL)

1. Compare and contrast this sonnet with the next one, Anthem for Doomed Youth. The sentiments contained in each are very different.  
*Brooke glorifies war, making the act of signing up seem noble and brave. Owen sees the deaths of a soldier for what it is: a sad loss of young life, unceremoniously cut down, deprived of a proper burial, with the only mourners being the fellow soldiers who really understand. Brooke sees the soldier as willingly giving his life, thereby enriching the place where he falls. There is a sense of personal sacrifice and pride in Brooke's sonnet; only a sense of loss and waste in Owen's.*

2. Do you think Rupert Brooke had seen active service when he wrote this poem? Had he survived would he have changed his views? Or are there people who are born and die patriots, believing every bit of propaganda? Does this make Brooke a fundamentalist?

*These questions are intended for discussion: your views are important. It is likely Brooke wrote the poem before seeing active service, or at least before seeing the wholesale slaughter of men in the trenches. It is hard to believe that anyone would hold on to views like these if forced to witness the awful privation and horrendous war wounds of fellow soldiers. Perhaps he would have changed his views. Yes, there are died-in-the-wool patriots, but these are people who lack imagination. Perhaps such people whole-heartedly accept the propaganda that is fed to them. I do not think Brooke is a fundamentalist. I think he is innocent of the 'real' war. What do you think?*

3. Pick out examples of propaganda from the poem and discuss each. (The War Office loved Brooke; he was their spokesman.)

*Phrases like "a corner of a foreign field" that is "forever England" has a patriotic ring to it, embodying the sacrifice made by those who die far away from home and the 'gift' of their bodies to the dust in order to create a little bit of England in the middle of Belgium or France. The personification of England as some kind of beneficent mother, bestowing noble and worthwhile qualities on its fighting men, establishes a patriotic aura: 'blest' and 'all evil shed away' makes the soldier's sacrifice seem heroic, a gift for his motherland.*

### **9. Anthem for Doomed Youth - Wilfred Owen (HL & FAL)**

- 1. "solemn" has a less fearful sound than "monstrous", which is stronger/inspires horror/fear; "solemn" is less pejorative/negative in its associations; an important occasion could be "solemn". "Our" would suggest conspiracy, or at the very least compliance with the motives that brought these soldiers to this place at this time. "Our guns" makes the soldiers complicit in the cause. "Our" would therefore smack of propaganda.*
- 2. This kind of question is good practice for section B. We suggest that FAL candidates practise this kind of question.*
- 3. Onomatopoeia of "rapid rattle" suggests the stuttering sound made by the automatic gun fire; Personification of "the anger of the guns" suggests danger and antagonism.*
- 4. The only way the boys will be remembered will be by those who cared for them, by those who feel the loss: in the eyes of fellow soldiers "the holy glimmer of goodbyes" and those at home who in their sorrow and loneliness close themselves off from the world in the act of drawing down the blinds.*
- 5. There will be no ceremony, no pomp. He would hope that his comrades would feel something as his passing is acknowledged.*

## 10. *Dulce et decorum est* – Wilfred Owen (HL)

1. *“The old lie” is the pumped up sense of glory that is captured in the Latin phrase that translates to ‘It is appropriate and sweet to die for your country’ suggesting that every young man would want to die for his country; that it was noble; that it made him worthy. This was the lie that the propagandists ‘sold’ to the young men of the country. It is a lie because it was neither sweet nor even appropriate to throw away human life as needlessly as in battles like Passchendaele.*
2. *The generals who plan the strategies and the offensives are responsible. These men send whole battalions into combat knowing what the likely losses will be.*
3. *Owen chooses a simple narrative structure, a story told by one of those soldiers on his way back from the battlefield after serving a turn in the trenches. The use of ‘we’ re-enforces the comradeship or one-ness with the other returning soldiers. The narrator is at once a soldier and a commentator. Add your own thoughts about the arrangement of stanzas and so on.*
4. *Nowadays readers might say the words were shouted, because of our association with CAPS in media, but why would it not give the same impression a hundred years ago. There must have been a sudden panic, a sense of chaos and shouted instructions. Gas attacks were feared, and the need to don gas masks in a hurry was imperative.*
5. *The most striking image is of the soldier overcome by gas who seems to be moving like an underwater swimmer. The gas would have made the landscape hazy, and remember that the observer would have been looking through a tiny pane in his own gas mask, something like the way a deep sea diver would see an underwater scene.  
Another image worthy of discussion is of the soldier thrown into the cart, close to death. The simile “like a devil’s sick of sin” is a provoking idea that will probably have many of you coming up with varied answers. The image is evocative of a kind of hell that would have even the devil ready to run away. The image captures the horror of that kind of death: the gas corrupts all the mucus membranes in the body causing the soldier literally to drown in his own blood.*
6. *The soldiers were on their way to their ‘billets’. Soldiers were housed in nearby towns. Here they would spend their rest periods between bouts of service in the trenches. A billet is a bed. They were on their way to where they would spend the next few days recuperating. (Rest and recreation.)*
7. *The speaker turns on ‘someone’ in fury. This ‘someone’ could be the Miss Jessie Pope mentioned before but when we apply practical criticism to the poem many years later, Miss Pope’s impact on WW1 has been largely forgotten, but the role played by the war mongers, the chiefs of staff in places like the Pentagon, do live on. You would not be incorrect to see the words as having a timeless ring, a warning to all those who think to send young men into battle allowing them to believe that they are doing it for some noble cause.*
8. *The reader can feel Owen’s tone. It is caustic. When he talks about their “high zest” his sarcasm screams his personal protest.*

### **11. In Flanders Fields – John McCrae (NEP)**

*This sample question will give you an idea of the preparation needed for Section A. This poem is not for Exam Purposes but it gives an idea of the kind of questions that will be asked. It is easy to apply the same question to other poems that are examinable and see what you come up with. Please note: no memos for essay questions will be provided.*

## **PART 2.2 PEACE: AFTER WORLD WAR I**

### **12. On Passing the New Menin Gate – Siegfried Sassoon (HL & FAL)**

- 1. Sassoon survived the war and saw the monument erected for the fallen. He is outraged that authorities would think that a pile of stone is sufficient recompense.*
- 2. “foulness of their fate” is particularly striking,; “pile of peace-complacent stone” equally so. The alliteration reinforces the stress laid on these words, adding to the speaker’s tone. The reader fully appreciates the virulent sarcasm in calling the monument a “pile of peace-complacent stone”.*
- 3. “Dead” is capitalized because they are deserving/noteworthy; “Gateway” is capitalized because the Menin monument is a monstrosity; Salient, used here as a noun, is showing the conspicuousness of the monument, how it makes its presence known as a landmark or feature. It cannot be avoided. It is noticeable/prominent. The caps stress this.*
- 4. This is another possible essay question. Consider the possibility of being asked to bring in more than one poem from more than one period in your answer. A memo is not provided because pointers in an essay memo discourage creative thinking. Your opinion is important to us.*

### **13. At the Cenotaph – Siegfried Sassoon (NEP)**

*Do no more than draw attention to the gloss/allusion.*

### **14. For the Fallen – Lawrence Binyon (HL & FAL)**

- 1. What do you think? It might have something to do with the special cadence of the language used, or the sentiments expressed; it might evoke sympathy; the language might seem eloquent to you.*
- 2. A traditional arrangement might make the lines more quotable, and so more memorable. We quote and remember lines that have a message.*
- 3. Perhaps too old-fashioned. Elegiac, but it does seem sincere/heartfelt. What is troubling is that the War Office would probably have wholeheartedly approved the verse for its sentiments. Wilfred Owen might have admired Lawrence Binyon’s prosody (versification) but he might have thought the poem sentimental. What do you think?*
- 4. A few thoughts on the essay question: It is a good Remembrance Day choice because the aim is to remember the dead in the most positive light, not an opportunity for anti-war protest.*

*Widows and family of the departed want the sweet words; they want to believe that the sacrifice made by their loved ones was heroic and not for a lost cause. Bear in mind that these are opinions. You may think of something equally valid.*

### **15. *my sweet old etcetera* – e e cummings (HL)**

- 1. So many mothers were losing sons in the war. There would have been awareness in communities that probably sparked conversations on the topic of loss on a daily basis. Aware that other women might have lost sons, mothers self-consciously used platitudes like this one in conversation. Mothers were aware that their own son might be next. It was a way to remain pragmatic in the face of possible heartbreak.*
- 2. He was in the mud in a trench somewhere far away from home.*
- 3. He is fantasizing about his girlfriend/wife/lover's body.*
- 4. Every able-bodied man was expected to sign up. His father may have been too old or he may have suffered from an infirmity that precluded registering for duty. The irony is that soldiers on the front often envied those who lost a limb and were sent home/could no longer fight.*  
*FOR DISCUSSION: Try to appreciate the creative way cummings shapes sense out of seeming non-sense. For example "my mother//hoped I would die" makes no sense unless the reader searches for the subtext carried by "etcetera". "etcetera" becomes a correlative for all sorts of things in the poem, even intimate parts of his beloved are effectively nuanced.*

## **PART 2.3 THE SONGS OF WORLD WAR 1 AND 2**

### **16. *Pack up your troubles* – (NEP)**

*It would be a good idea to listen to some of the songs. YouTube would be useful. This song is particularly upbeat.*

### **17. *Keep the Home Fires Burning* (NEP)**

*WORKSHOP QUESTION: Your views are important. You might think of something here that you will be able to use in the exam.*

### **18. *The White Cliffs of Dover* (NEP)**

*DISCUSSION QUESTION: What do you think about these terms? Fatherland might sound more parochial to you. It may spark feelings of patriotism or pride. Motherland might inspire warm feelings of value; of something worth fighting for or defending.*